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# SOVIET ACTIVE MEASURES AND DISINFORMATION:

by

## OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT DENNIS KUX

Lately there has been increased public attention regarding Soviet "disinformation" and "active measures," attempts by Moscow to influence political attitudes and public opinion in non-communist countries through deceptive and often covert means.

Yet serious analysis has been limited. There has been a great deal of focus on Moscow's espionage endeavors, but this other facet of the Kremlin's intelligence operations has received far less scrutiny, either by the press or academics.

The terminology pertaining to the subject is unfamiliar and loosely defined, even among specialists. In fact, the terms "active measures" and "disinformation" are both imported directly from the Soviet intelligence lexicon. "Disinformation," the more frequently used and better-known term, is the English transliteration of the Russian "dezinformatsiya" or misinforming through the dissemination of information that is totally or partially false. The phrase "active measures" is the English translation of "aktivnyye meropriyatiya," the name of the Soviet KGB unit charged with implementing these activities.

In Soviet intelligence doctrine, the concept of "active measures" covers a wide span of practices including disinformation operations, political influence efforts, and the activities of Soviet front groups and foreign communist parties. All active measures have the common goal of enhancing Soviet influence, usually by tarnishing the image of opponents. They generally involve elements of deception and often employ clandestine means to mask Moscow's hand in the operation.

Overall, where active measures fit in the Soviet framework may be better understood by considering the whole spectrum of Soviet foreign policy endeavors through the optic of "white," "gray," and "black" operations. Normal diplomatic, trade, aid, and informational efforts can be considered

"white" or overt activities. "Gray" activities are those involving communist fronts, foreign communist parties, "clandestine" radio stations, or well-known media outlets for disinformation. While not officially acknowledged to be Soviet sponsored, semi-overt "gray" activities are widely known as under Soviet direction and control. In contrast, "black" activities involve genuinely clandestine operations: the use of agents of influence, spreading false rumors, duping politicians and journalists, and disseminating forgeries and fake documents. Active measures fall under either the "gray" or the "black" rubric, although the line between the semi-overt and the clandestine is often blurred.

Finding an appropriate English phrase to describe active measures is difficult. Former Under Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger has written: "No phrase in English conveys precisely the meaning of active measures. Perhaps World War II psychological warfare operations provide the closest parallel."

## BACKGROUND

The Soviets first used active measures as a policy tool in the 1920s when Moscow sought to discredit emigre groups in Western Europe, particularly in France, by spreading disinformation and by luring emigre activists back to Russia through various subterfuges. Even before the 1917 Revolution, the Tsarist secret police employed similar deceptive techniques, using foreign agents not only to collect intelligence but also to sow dissent among emigre groups and, by covert subsidies to selected journals, to attempt to create a better foreign press for Imperial Russia.

In the 1950s the Soviet Union institutionalized these practices, establishing an intelligence unit that specialized in disinformation; this was Department D within the First Chief Directorate of the Soviet intelligence organization. In the 1960s, the term

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